

Big Black Arrows (and Prayer)



HONEST
-THEOLOGY-

If you know me, or have ever heard me speak, you have probably heard me refer to “Big Black Arrows” (BBAs for short!). I pray for them, watch for them, depend on them, and am thankful for them no matter where or what I’m doing. Here’s how the prayer works,

“Lord, I’m rather clueless and preoccupied as I go through my daily life, but I want only what you want for me. Please, paint Big Black Arrows (not grey or any other easy to miss color!) for me to follow and I will.”

You know, praying is an interesting thing. Your prayers with God should be just like your conversation styles with individuals; unique and personal. I struggled for a long time with my inability to do the fancy, deep prayers that ministers say aloud (and are regularly the only ones we hear, right?) versus the ones I conjured up privately in my head. I got thinking about how Abraham was described as a [friend of God](#) and, if you take the time to read Abraham’s story in Genesis (Genesis 12-25) you’ll discover that Abraham questioned God A LOT: [Genesis 15:8](#), [Genesis 15:2](#), and [Genesis 18:23-33](#) (this is a long interesting debate, by the way). Then I thought, “I want to be a friend of God, too... maybe I should start asking questions.” The rest is history. And, you should know, I NEVER was comfortable praying out loud. The first time I got stuck doing it (yes, stuck) for want of a better way, I started with, “Hi Lord, I’m really uncomfortable with this praying out loud stuff, but everyone is making me do it so...” People chuckled quietly and at the end of the session I had a number of people come up and say, “I was so blessed by the way you prayed!” The only way I was really comfortable was just being ... me ... and God affirmed that!

There is a lot more to praying than just asking. It’s an attitude adjustment that involves your (ever growing faith) and God’s loving, continual revealing of Who God is, What God can do, and What God needs you to be. Let me explain.

Prayer is *not* a wish list. Philip Yancey writes in *Prayer, Does it Make Any Difference?* that “Prayer is the act of seeing reality from God’s point of view.” He hammers this point home with, “if God doesn’t want something for me, I shouldn’t want it either.” And then gives a final punch with, “Isn’t it the greatest possible disaster, when you are wrestling with God, not to be beaten?”

Becoming part of Jesus Christ’s community of believers invites the love, comfort, assurance, encouragement, and insight of the [Spirit that comes to dwell within us](#). There’s even a verse that says that when we are so weak – that we can’t even pray! – [the Spirit will do it for us!](#) It is a spiritual super power that transcends the everyday world in ways we can only begin to comprehend.

BBAs:

- ...come at God’s perfect timing. They teach [patience](#) while at the same time offering [confidence](#). God answers all prayers by saying, “Yes”, “No”, or “Not yet”.
- ...almost always seem to work in ways that are nothing like we expected. [God doesn’t think like us!](#)

- ...consistently turn out to be better than we ever [imagined](#).
- ...work in [all circumstances](#): the good, the bad, and the truly ugly.
- ...carry an assurance that [if God's answer is "No"](#) that is because there is a much better option.
- ...can be initially [painful](#): the failure to get a much-desired job, the end of a relationship, the loss of a job, the acceptance of impossibility to do something you really wanted to do, etc. (These are all some of mine!)
- ...can be unimaginably [wonderful](#): securing a position you never thought you could manage, finding love in the most unexpected places, successfully doing something you initially said "No!" to, finding an avenue of joy, confidence, and passion that you never even dreamed about, etc. (These are all some of mine, too.)
- ...almost consistently [lead you](#) to a "good" place from a "bad" place in your life. This can (ironically? paradoxically?) cause you to say, "I'd never want to go through that part of my life again, but I am *so much better than I ever imagined now...*"
- ...with experience and time become a source of assured hope and comfort even in the midst of dark times [even before](#) any rescue or solution is in sight.

BBAAs affirm and prove that [nothing is impossible](#) when we walk with God. All we need to do is abandon our life's driver's seat to God and get into the passenger seat (and buckle our seatbelt!) BBAAs, for me anyway, have opened a wide door in my understanding of how God works with those who love and trust the Mission and Message of Jesus Christ.

Conversations with God can start small, but never stay small; I promise you. The more we talk with Him, the more we begin to recognize God's voice, God's timing, and God's direction. Over time, those Big Black Arrows begin to appear in places we never expected. Sometimes they point us somewhere exciting. Sometimes they lead us through places we would never have chosen. But they always lead us somewhere good. So, keep praying. Keep asking questions. And keep watching for those arrows!

Scripture to maybe check out:

- [Psalm 30](#) - David prayed this prayer of repentance and joy after he *really messed up*.

Bibliography notes:

1. For this post I used The New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition put out by the 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Feel free to research from your own translation or look up the many that are available on [Bible Gateway](#).
2. My quotes from Philip Yancey's EXCELLENT book on prayer are found here: Philip Yancey, *Prayer - Does It Make Any Difference* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 2006), 108. ("...if God doesn't want..."); Yancey, *Prayer - Does It Make Any Difference*, 29. ("...seeing reality..."); and Philip Yancey, *Prayer - Does It*

Make Any Difference 153. (“...the greatest possible disaster...” This quote is attributed to Simone Weil.)

What are your thoughts about this post? Email me and let me know!
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